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ABSTRACT

Intended for practitioners involved in working with groups in basic education, this book provides some ideas on suitable approaches. An introduction addresses where group work takes place and why a group approach is used. A discussion of starting points covers first meetings, planning and preparing, and teaching aids. A description of a group session is intended to show an example of what can be done with a group. The next section offers ideas for group work, including using common interests, using common experiences, functional activities, developing a specific skill, and developing reading and comprehension skills. A section on talking and discussion in groups considers the tutor's role, especially in the side conversation, conflict, coping with silences, and questions. Two methods are then suggested for writing in groups: a group writing day and a problem page. An example is then presented that shows how a tutor could deal with a group that contains students of varying ages, background, and ability. Another example follows group work over several weeks. The final topic is managing the group and covers the group leader, dealing with new students, changing relationships, evaluation, the diary, and problems encountered by group tutors. (YLB)

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Teaching Groups

A Basic Education Handbook

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Note on Style

For the purpose of clarity and simplicity the pronoun 'he' has been used to refer to students and 'she' to refer to tutors, except where examples are given.

Acknowledgements

Page 13
Photograph: Peckham Bookplace, 13 Peckham High Street, London SE15.

Page 14
Daily Mirror, Monday 19 January 1981, 'Homeward Bound', (Front Page).

Page 22
The Guardian, October 20 1981, (Page 3).

Pages 33 and 39
'Let Loose' published by: Write First Time.

Teaching Groups

A Basic Education Handbook

Contents

Preface	2
Introduction	3
Starting points	6
A typical group session	13
Some ideas for group work	21
Talking in a group	32
Talking and writing in groups	39
Dealing with individual differences in a group	44
Group work over several weeks	49
Managing the group	52

ALBSU
Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit

Preface

Until fairly recently the majority of adult literacy and basic skills tuition has been organised on an individual basis and this included not only 1:1 tuition in education centres but also a considerable amount of individual tuition in students' and tutors' own homes. However, in the last few years a considerable amount of small group tuition has been made available and currently the majority of students in England and Wales learn in groups.

The Unit would not wish to support one method of tuition at the expense of any other but rather tries to encourage the maximum amount of flexibility so that each student can choose from a range of different learning opportunities. "Teaching Groups: A Basic Education Handbook" is aimed at practitioners involved in working with groups in basic education and attempts to provide some ideas on suitable approaches. The book was written by a group of practitioners convened by ALBSU and edited and published by the Unit. As is our normal practice we have tried to make it available at as low a price as possible.

Finally I would like to thank two members of ALBSU's staff Judith Banbury and Rosemary Carter who were responsible for the co-ordination and production of this book.

Alan Wells
Director
Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit

Introduction

This book is intended for those who are involved in working with groups in basic education. Much literacy and basic skills work is organised on an individual basis to allow the tutor to identify and deal with the individual student's needs. However, many students also learn in groups and this book is intended for tutors who are either thinking about introducing group work, or who have already started doing so and would like some further ideas on suitable methods and materials.

Some of the basic education courses in which group work takes place are:

1. Literacy and numeracy courses in adult education centres.
2. Preparatory TOPS courses.
3. Basic literacy and numeracy courses in Further Education Colleges.
4. Basic education courses for the unemployed which are part of the Youth Opportunities programme.
5. Basic education courses for the older unemployed.

These courses may have a wide range of tutor/student ratios and therefore the term 'group' is not the same as 'class'. A teacher in further education may have a class of 20 students but might still organise some work involving smaller groups of five or six. If the class you teach is larger than that described in an example in the book, there may be a way of arranging work so that you can divide the class into smaller units. If there are a number of tutors available, or if some students have work that they need to get on with on their own, it may be easier to manage this.

There are some issues which face every group tutor in further or in basic education. Any tutor has to reconcile the needs of the individuals in the group to the group as a whole. However, this issue is particularly important for group tutors in basic education since their students may not be as confident about their ability to learn as students who are in higher education. It is also likely that students in basic education may be put off by teaching methods which do not take account of their feelings and attitudes.

In most groups the range of needs and abilities of students is wide and usually there are differences in age, background and attitude. Barbara, a group tutor for a one-day-a-week course for unemployed adults in an inner city community centre, describes this range:

"I have twelve students in my group, the youngest is 18, the oldest is 45. Roughly half and half men and women. When they first arrived, I realised that two men could hardly read and write at all, while two of the women, although they had no qualifications, might with a lot of work get into a college or polytechnic.

Added to this, the group changes slightly every week. If someone gets a job or a course or simply just leaves, we let someone join from the waiting list – I've therefore got to make a few new ones feel welcome nearly every week and help them understand how we work in the group."

Barbara has a great deal to cope with, and has to plan teaching material very carefully to satisfy all the requirements of the individuals in the group. In other sections of the book there are suggestions about the way to prepare teaching material for groups and also advice on the way to deal with individual difficulties in a group. Ways of developing communication between student and student are also considered, as this can be one of the more difficult aspects of group work.

Group tuition has an important part to play in the development of students' independence and confidence, since it can relieve anxieties and increase the feeling of being supported. Many students come to literacy and basic skills classes with damaged self-esteem and the strong belief that they have nothing worthwhile to say, nothing to contribute. Being able to contribute to and participate not only in their own learning but the learning of others can be a very powerful and exhilarating experience, and one that goes a long way towards restoring self-confidence and a sense of value. This book makes the following assumptions:

Group Tuition

There are several kinds of group tuition; each one has some uses, all have advantages and disadvantages.

The examples used in this book concentrate on group tuition in which students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning.

The examples aim to show ways of developing communication between student and student.

Why use group tuition?

It is a way of:

- ☐ pooling the experience of individuals in the group
- ☐ encouraging students to learn from one another
- ☐ developing oral communication skills
- ☐ exchanging and examining opinions and attitudes.

Why use group tuition in basic education?

Group tuition can help to:

- ☐ build the student's confidence
- ☐ develop independent learning
- ☐ encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning
- ☐ foster co-operation and good relationships.

Much group tuition includes an element of talking or discussion, as most students are more confident about speaking than they are about reading and writing.

There is a strong relationship between speaking/listening and reading/writing, because

* talking clarifies and encourages a critical approach to words and their meaning
* talking increases and enhances vocabulary
* talking arouses interest in a subject
* talking helps to get your ideas in sequences.

Therefore, talking and discussion in groups will help to develop students' abilities and confidence in reading and writing.

Starting points

It is important that a good relationship should be established as quickly as possible between tutors and students in a group, as the most effective learning takes place when relationships are good.

Only a minority of adults continue in education after school and while some will have support and encouragement from family or friends, others, particularly young adults, may have to "run the gauntlet" of their friends if they admit that they are attending a basic education group. So the tutor has the task of demonstrating to students that coming to a group can be a profitable and pleasant experience.

The tutor will also need to get to know students in two ways - personally, so that they may feel more confident - and educationally. By understanding something of the students personal situation and their basic aim in attending the group the tutor will be able to provide appropriate help.

I personaly think that my education is poor. The reason I belive this is because I have to travel quiet a bit and so I have to change to quiet a few different schools. In my first School there were some teachers I could not understand. They were my maths teacher and my pysicss teacher.

Students' writing can give you insight into basic aims and expectations, however there are some more informal ways of getting to know students. Some of these are:

- ☐ Making yourself available before and after the session.
- ☐ Allocating time for group or individual tutorials.

- ☐ Talking to other tutors who come into contact with the group.
- ☐ Going with students for a coffee break.
- ☐ Talking about yourself as well as asking students questions.

First Meetings

Of course tutors don't get to know every student immediately, although a start can be made at the first meeting. While some students will talk quite freely about their needs, others may take several weeks to get enough confidence to speak up, or even to feel that their needs are worth a mention. Similarly, many tutors find the first meeting with a group a bit unnerving, particularly when the members of the group don't know each other and are waiting for something to happen.

The first ten minutes are often the worst because everyone is conscious that they are making a first impression. It is often a surprise to tutors when they later realise how nervous their students were at the first meeting. A natural way of getting over this is for the tutor to introduce herself and the course or education centre and to invite questions from the students. This is useful and often avoids embarrassment later.

"I hadn't been teaching long and I had to teach a group of first year craft students at 10.00 one morning in my new college. I walked in to absolute silence. I was so put off by this that I just went straight into the lesson I had planned, which was a comprehension exercise. Towards the end of the lesson when we had all relaxed a bit, I realised that no-one even knew my name, or what I was supposed to be teaching. It was their first morning and they didn't even know where the canteen was. Fortunately, I realised and we had a long session of questions and answers. The students' questions revealed how bewildered they were.

'What does MSC mean?' 'Do we have to take an exam?' 'What's occupational skills mean?' 'Where can I park my bike?' 'Do I have to sign in?' "

Before a first meeting there are lots of things the tutor can find out about a group and things she can plan which will help the group over the first awkward moments. A tutor might ask herself the following questions:

1. Do the members of the group know each other?
2. Do they know what the course is about?

3. Have they been to the centre/college before?
4. Do they know my name?
5. Do they know each other's names?
6. Do they know where to go for tea breaks?

Introductions

If the tutor feels sure the students would not feel they were being asked to take part in a 'silly game' there are some exercises that can be used to help everyone get to know each other better.

1. Each person in the group finds a partner. There should be an even number of people and the tutor should be included if possible. After a few minutes conversation, each person is asked to introduce the other to the group. This can be better than asking people to introduce themselves which can be an embarrassing experience for anyone. However, before starting this exercise make it clear that the information from the conversation is to be made public to the group.

2. If writing is not likely to be a problem, each person may be asked to write a number of facts about himself on a postcard. (These can be quite simple e.g. I have four children, I drive a motorbike, I take sugar in my tea.) Each person then moves round the group, looking at the cards, talking to each individual and then signs the back of the card.

In these exercises it is most important that the tutor is an involved as everyone else. In fact, tutor involvement is quite a useful yardstick to judge games and exercises of this sort, as if you wouldn't do it yourself, then it is highly likely the students wouldn't.

Planning and preparing

One of the advantages of working in a group is the wide range of resources and support that come from other group members. The sharing of thinking and experience, the help and encouragement which students give each other all contribute to the individual's learning. But the big disadvantage from the planning point of view is precisely that diversity – every group is composed of individuals with different skills, needs, aspirations and experiences. So, when planning a session, the tutor must be aware of individual differences and needs, and then find ways of using a common theme to enable students to achieve their particular goals.

Ideas

Ideas can come from

☐ tutor ☐ student ☐ group

and can be

- *Common interest* topical, local event, news, politics, film.
- *General interest* housing, schooldays, money, children, sport.
- *Functional tasks* form-filling, letters, mail order, hire purchase.
- *Skills* spelling, writing, reading, comprehension, handwriting, punctuation.

The idea can be presented by means of article, film, video, book extract, visit, speaker, tape, record, picture, poem.

Who does the planning?

Usually it is the tutor who at first takes the initiative and does most of the planning and presentation. As time goes on, however, the skills and interests of the group members emerge, and may contribute to a session.

- In one group, a student was an expert in metalwork; he talked about it and gave a demonstration.
- In another, one of the men collected military medals, and was encouraged to bring them in and give a short talk.

It's not always necessary for the tutor to take the lead in a discussion; using the knowledge and interest of a student will often lead to a more stimulating session. However, the tutor will need to be aware of the expertise within a group, and may have to encourage an individual student to take on the role of leader for a part of the session.

Presenting the idea

The best way to present an idea is the one that gets the message across most effectively and most vividly, and obviously that depends on a number of factors – the nature of the idea itself, the group, the tutor, the facilities and the time available. There is a whole range of formats to choose from and there is no reason why only one should be used, including:

video	photo	magazine article
TV	picture	technical manual
record	poem	form
tape	book	OHP
film	newspaper article	blackboard

In general terms, the more concrete and active the experience, the better. A firsthand experience is a much more powerful way of stimulating interest eg. – a speaker, a visit, a demonstration or a real letter to be written.

While working on the general theme of health and diet, one group went down to the medical room to be weighed and measured – with the result that they now have a thriving 'weight-watchers' sub-group run at the Institute at their request.

How much preparation needs to be done?

It is probably true to say that most tutors would prefer to over-prepare and run the risk of having some ideas left over at the end rather than to be caught on the hop, at least when they first begin to work with a group. It is also true that good preparation indicates to the group a certain amount of commitment and interest in the subject and in them from the start. However, it may be necessary to be flexible enough to abandon the lesson plan and follow the direction of the discussion, and to be able to adapt lesson plans for follow-up work to suit the group and the individual.

Although at first the amount of time spent in preparation may be lengthy, often work prepared for one session will extend over a number of weeks so that preparation time may in fact be reduced.

The room

Before beginning to teach students as a group, there are a number of things the tutor should think about if a 'good spirit' is to develop within the group. Adult education often takes place in rooms designed for others, maybe in a room with no tables but with an ample supply of large, soft arm-chairs. A large hall may be used for a class of ten students where a more appropriate number would be fifty. Chairs and tables may be infant-sized.

Seating arrangements

It is all too easy to just walk into a classroom and begin teaching without considering the seating arrangements, yet in group work all of the members of the group need to be able to speak to each other. It's difficult to talk to the person in front if they are sitting with their back to you.

It is important to think carefully about the seating arrangements. If possible the tutor should arrange them into a more circular or horseshoe shape.

Many students will have been taught in formal classrooms with desks in rows, the teacher at the front. They may feel quite happy with this type of arrangement and consider that 'proper' learning and 'proper' teaching can only be carried out in rooms like this.

'In one classroom where I took an evening class, the tables and chairs were usually arranged in a horseshoe shape. One week at the end of term, the class had been used for exams during the day. Desks in rows – a quite unfamiliar arrangement. It felt very odd and school-like to be taught in such a room'.

The following comments from students show that the arrangement of the classroom can have a distinct effect on what goes on.

'It was always rather like a lecture. The teacher seemed much more interested in talking to the blackboard than to the students. We just tended to sit back and listen. She obviously didn't want our opinions. Unless it was really interesting I used to just day dream'.

'It was great. So different from school. We were all really involved. Lessons were really lively with everyone talking to everyone else. The teacher seemed to want to know what we all thought and didn't try to run the show'.

Teaching Aids

In group work there is often a need to share information. Many tutors provide copies of information or reading matter, either the book itself or typed or handwritten copies.

However, there are a number of teaching aids which can be used to provide everyone in the group with the same information, or the same reading matter. These aids can be used by both the tutor and the student.

Flipcharts and chalk boards

Useful for:

- writing up individual words that come up during the session
- making lists
- listing points made in discussion or debate
- showing the working out of a problem.

Disadvantages:

- ☐ reminds some people of school
- ☐ not always available
- ☐ can badly affect legibility of people's handwriting.

Overhead projector

Advantages:

- ☐ transparencies can be prepared before the class and taken in ready-made
- ☐ can be used again at another time without more preparation
- ☐ has a greater air of sophistication than blackboard
- ☐ prepared OHP transparencies can be typed rather than handwritten
- ☐ enables tutor to face the group while pointing to particular words.

Disadvantages:

- ☐ not always suitable
- ☐ bulbs may break, fuse blow
- ☐ can be tiring to look at for tutor and student
- ☐ not suitable for lengthy text or concentrated information.

A typical group session

The following description of a group session is intended to show a simple example of what can be done with a group.

Setting	A Literacy Class in an Adult Institute, two hours per week.
The Group	3 women, 5 men, 1 assistant tutor, 1 group tutor. 8 students with reasonable reading abilities, but with varying spelling and writing problems.
Aim	To encourage critical use of language giving practice in speaking, reading and writing.
Material	Newspaper article 'Homeward Bound' (American hostages in Iran). Chosen because of the common interest of the group in current affairs.

HOSTAGES

It's a deal say Iranians

HOMEWARD BOUND

By CHRISTOPHER BUCKLAND in London and PAUL CONNEW in Washington

THE AMERICAN hostage crisis was all over last night with just the popping of the champagne corks to come.

Barring last-minute hitches, the 52 hostages will fly out of Iran within hours.

For the first time Iranian officials confirmed last night that a deal had been clinched—an unprecedented cash - for - prisoners contract worth billions of pounds.

What looks like being the decisive move in the most extraordinary cat-and-mouse game in world history came from Iran yesterday.

Iran's chief negotiator Behzad Nabavi said his country had "finally reached agreement. Only wholly trivial points remained to be hammered out" he said.

Carter 'is all set to fly out'

Dashed

It was that news, desperately awaited, that put the champagne on ice in Washington.

President Jimmy Carter dashed back from his retreat at Camp David to the White House.

Some advisers said he was ready to fly to Wiesbaden air base in West Germany to greet the 50 men and two women who have been held captive for 443 days.

But a White House official said that "under no circumstances" would Carter miss the ceremonies for President-elect Ronald Reagan's inauguration tomorrow. It is thought that Carter might fly to West Germany and return to Washington in time for the ceremony.

The hostages were seized when militant Iranian students stormed the American embassy in Teheran in November 1979.

Five months later American forces launched a catastrophic attempt to rescue them.

Since then world tension has spiralled and President Carter's defeat last November was blamed on his inability to deal with the crisis.

In the past few days there has been extraordinary financial juggling. Two top Bank of England officials have been helping to finish the long drawn-out crisis with the help of 50 tons of British gold.

In the end the sticking point was thought to be the amount of interest that Iran should be paid on billions of pounds of assets seized in revenge for the taking of the hostages.

The hostage issue has also worsened the already icy relations between America and Russia.

Moscow radio claimed that America was planning military moves against Iran once the hostages were freed.

The claim raised a storm of protest in Washington, including the carpeting of Russia's ambassador.

PRISONERS: Some of the American hostages on their first day of captivity.

Resources	Individual newspaper articles (photocopies). Individual worksheets. Crosswords. Tapes
Space	Informal seating around table.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Lesson Pattern

First part of the session: tutor reads article to group while students follow words on their copy. Discussion follows where main issued are considered:

a) What is the feeling amongst group members about the American hostage situation?

b) Why does the group think the hostages were freed in the end?

Worksheet

Each student has a copy of the worksheet.

HOMEWARD BOUND

QUESTIONS

1. Think of another title for this article.
2. How many hostages are there in Iran?
3. Has an agreement been reached to release the hostages?
4. Who negotiated the release?
5. When were the hostages siezed?
6. What affect has the hostage issue had on relations between America and Russia?

FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS

7. Barring last-minute hitches .....
8. Iran's chief negotiator .....
9. Since then world tension .....
10. Moscow radio claimed .....

What do you feel about the American hostage situation?

Do you think President Carter made the situation worse with his rescue attempt?

Imagine that you have a friend or relative who is being kept hostage. Write a letter to them to try and cheer them up.

Dictionary Work

unprecedented inauguration militant catastrophic

Each student is encouraged to put in writing his own views. Tutors assist students who need more support with writing. The worksheet is not intended, necessarily, to be 'completed' methodically from beginning to end, and any section can be used by students in any order. In this way choice is given and students are not forced to give their opinions. For example, one student may want to tackle the dictionary work first, while another may prefer to start the comprehension exercise.

Second part of the lesson: Some students begin to work on individual spelling problems which have arisen in their own writing and may use self-correcting exercises with tapes. Tutors circulate to give help where needed.

On one occasion when this material was used, one student had particular problems with endings of words. In her writing she omitted 'ed' from several words. The tutor suggested that she scan the newspaper article and underlined all words with 'ed' and then used them as a self-correcting exercise against her own work. Another student's spelling mistakes really needed to be practised in another context to ensure meaning as well as written accuracy. The tutor prepared some cloze exercises during the session.

Any member of the group who needed to practice spelling could do so either at home or before the beginning of the following week's session.

confirmed
remained
awaited
spiralled
seized
raised
worsened
claimed
clinched
hammered
stormed
blamed

extraordinary negotiator trivial champagne embassy crisis

1) Many people drink c_____ at weddings.

2) If a c_____ develops at work we send a n_____ to speak to the manager.

3) The gossip columns of the newspapers contain t_____ items.

4) If you lose your passport abroad you should report it to the e_____ of your country.

5) Something which is unusual and doesn't happen every day is e_____.

Third part of the lesson: Group work on a 'tailor-made' crossword which has been designed to account for the needs of the individual and the group.

CROSSWORD

'ing' endings to accompany 'Homeward Bound' article on the Iranian Hostages.

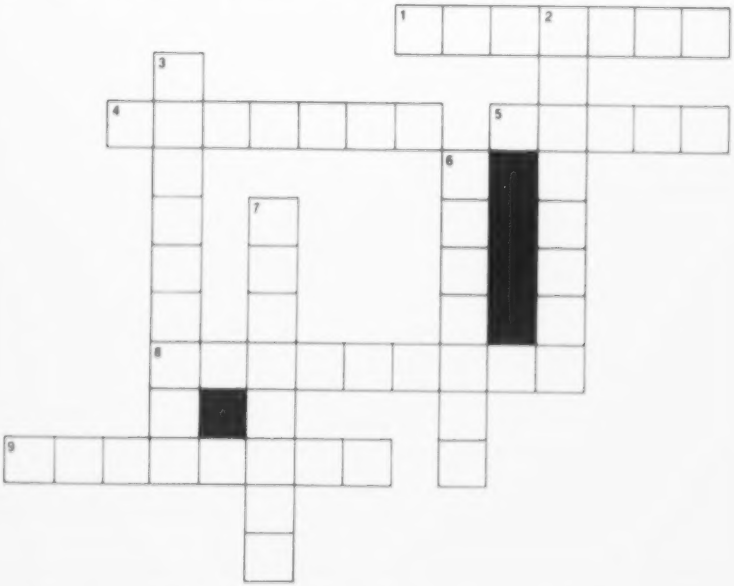
All the answers can be found in the text.

CLUES ACROSS

1. Champagne corks . . . . . (Sound they make.)
2. (Unless prevented by) . . . . . Last minute hitches.
5. Billions of dollars seized in revenge for . . . . . (Opposite of giving) hostages.
8. (As well as) . . . . . the carpeting of Russia's Ambassador.
9. Extraordinary financial . . . . . (like an act done at a circus.)

CLUES DOWN

2. America was . . . . . (Mapping out) military moves.
3. Was Russia's Ambassador under someone's feet when he had this . . . . . .
6. Two British bank officials have been . . . . . (assisting.)
7. The point that could gum up the works . . . . . .



There may be some students who will want to continue or finish their work, and if so sub-group activities should occur naturally – with some students working on the crosswords and others continuing with other work.

The contents of this lesson are intended for one two-hour session, but similar activities and format could be repeated the following week, to help revise any new learning and give extra practice with individual problems. The tutor can also encourage students to suggest the following week's topic for discussion.

By using time in this way, it is possible to provide:

a) Individual work which is based on students' problems arising during the session or from the week before, e.g. spelling, punctuation.

b) Some group learning based on a current topic of interest including discussion, reading and writing.

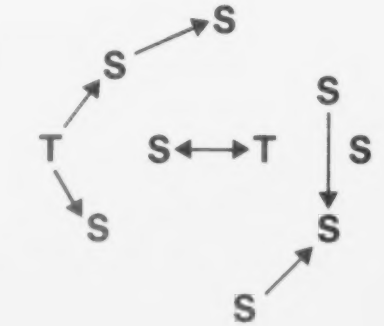
c) Group and sub-group work.

Although this lesson 'pattern' may appear to have a strong routine element, it should provide a basic structure for group activities, and can, of course, be varied. How much time is spent on each task will depend very much on the individual members of the group and how they respond as a group. The changes in activity provide a reasonable balance between interest-based learning and the sub-skills of language and help to avoid the group concentrating for too long on one exercise.

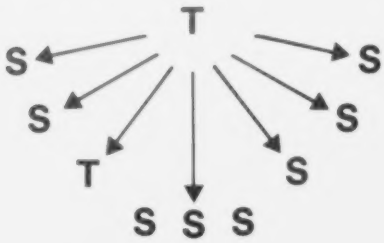
Pattern of tuition

This two hour session gives examples of a variety of methods that could be used with groups.

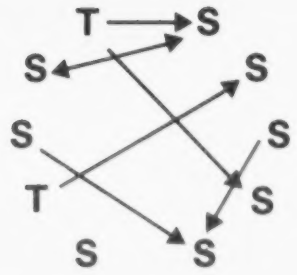
7.00 - 7.05
Students arrive, chat briefly to each other and tutors.



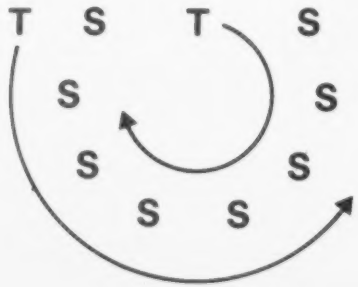
7.05 - 7.15
Informal seating. Tutor introduces a newspaper article and reads it.



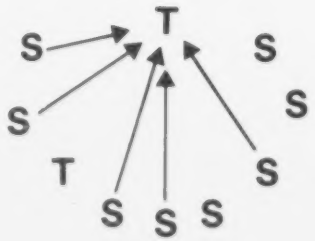
7.15 - 7.40
Group discuss issue raised by article.



7.40 - 8.15
Each student writes his/her opinion.
(Worksheets given out, with choice).

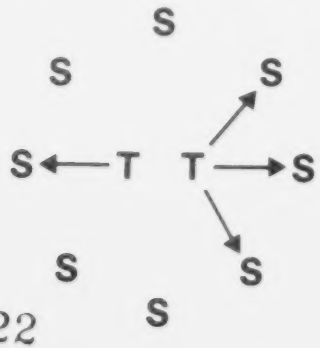


Students read own writing to group.
Further discussion.
Spelling activities, tapes etc.



8.15 - 8.25
Coffee break

8.25 - 9.00
Students continue to work on
own spelling and/or crossword.



22

This tutor chose a variety of methods for the group session and students did not always work in the whole group nor always work individually.

The advantages of using a variety of methods in a session are:

- ☐ It provides students with an opportunity to work on their own.
- ☐ It reduces the boredom which might be produced by using only one way of working.
- ☐ It provides the quieter student with an opportunity to talk in a smaller group.
- ☐ It allows the tutor to deal with individual problems or with problems all members of the group need help with.

Some ideas for group work

Tutors who have just started to work with students in a group will need to think of something which will interest all the students and at the same time allow for individual development of specific skills. It may be helpful for the tutor to ask herself the following questions:

- ☐ What are the students interested in?
- ☐ What do they generally talk about?
- ☐ Do they have any experiences in common?
- ☐ Is there a task they all need to do?
- ☐ Are there any common learning needs?

The answers may provide the tutor with a starting point for group work. Whatever the starting point, the tutor should, where possible:

- look for issues which students will see as worth discussing,
- bear in mind students' desire to improve their reading and writing skills,
- be prepared for changes of mind; a topic which students approach enthusiastically one week may be rejected later,
- when dealing with a controversial topic be prepared for strong feelings to be expressed in the group,
- if discussion arises the tutor shouldn't assume it will give rise to follow-up work, since some topics are only of temporary interest,
- keep materials which have been devised in working with one group, they may be useful for another group.

Using Common Interests

Topical issues

The stimulus for a session based on topical issues is often a report taken from the local or national press, which may need to be simplified or rewritten using larger print. (If it is decided to adapt an article to make it easier to read, it is a good idea to have the original so that it can be referred to during the session if necessary.)

Before the session the tutor may need to make some notes to help structure the discussion as well as getting enough copies of the article for each student. It is usually a good idea to give the students a few minutes to read the article to themselves and then for the tutor or one of the more confident students to read it aloud. For this kind of group activity it is not really appropriate to have students reading around the group, as in a mixed ability group there are bound to be some students who find reading aloud difficult, and reading around in this way can be painful and embarrassing for them and for the listener. The purpose of reading aloud in this type of activity is only to ensure that everyone has shared the information to start work.

Reporting of nuclear accidents to be examined after leak

By Richard Norton-Taylor

The Government yesterday ordered an urgent examination into the way accidents at nuclear plants are reported. The announcement in the Commons by Mr John Moore, Minister responsible for nuclear energy, follows the four-day delay in warning the public about the latest radiation leak at Windscale.

The plant was closed for 24 hours after the leak of iodine 131 into the air on Sunday, October 4. But it was not until the following Thursday that the plant operators, British Nuclear Fuels, released details of the accident which also led to a small increase in radiation in cows' milk on two local farms.

The company said yesterday that it had an informal arrangement with the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate, which will investigate the way in which incidents are reported, whereby a decision whether to make an announcement should be made. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Energy are also alerted.

According to Whitehall sources, the Energy Department was told of the accident on Wednesday, October 7, but Ministers, who were in Blackpool for the Tory Party conference, were not informed until later. In the event, news of the leak was first disclosed through the press.

The Ministry of Agriculture said that the discharge was well within permitted international levels. British Nuclear Fuels argues that it would have been justified not to have reported the incident at all, leaving it for the NII to include it in the Health and Executive's next quarterly report.

However, scientists disagree over the consequences of the leak and whether the affected milk should have been destroyed.

In answer to a question from Dr John Cunningham, Labour MP for Whitehaven and a member of the Windscale Liaison Committee, which was told of the incident at the same time as the press, Mr Moore said: "I intend to satisfy myself that (reporting) procedures are adequate and that procedures for informing the local community in the event of such incidents are satisfactory."

The Government also said that no irradiated fuel will in future be moved from nuclear power stations to the Windscale plant for reprocessing until it has been stored for at least 90 days. This is designed to allow radio-iodine to decay.

The Windscale, plant called Sellafield by British Nuclear Fuels, has had a history of accidents and a special inquiry, published last year after a big leak in 1979, criticised past monitoring practices there.

Milk sampling is continuing at 20 farms, 12 of which are close to the site, Mr Moore told the Commons.

LEAK IN NUCLEAR POWER STATION

The Government said yesterday
that it would look into the way that
accidents at nuclear power stations
are reported.
There was a four day delay
in warning people
about the latest radiation leak
at Windscale,
a nuclear power station
in the North of England.

The power station
was closed for 24 hours
after the leak,
on Sunday, October 4.

But it was not until the next Thursday
that details of the accident
were released.
The accident led to
an increase in radiation
in cows' milk
on two local farms.

The company said yesterday
that it had told
Government nuclear inspectors.
They decide
if the public should know
about accidents like this.

The Government was told
about the accident
on Wednesday October 7.
The public first heard
about the accident
in the newspapers.

Experts disagree
about how dangerous
the leak is,
and whether the milk
should have been destroyed.

This is why
the Government has said
it is looking into the way that
accidents like this
are reported.

The Windscale power station
has had a lot of accidents like this.

The Guardian
20.10.81

Using Common Experiences

Group activities based on common interests and experiences can be planned in a similar way to those already described. Many groups of students are interested in themes such as work, families and children, school experiences, marriage, sport, but it is really a question of getting to know the group and responding to their interests.

Sometimes the ideas will emerge spontaneously as happened in this Wednesday evening group.

The group was fairly large, consisting of five men and four women, a paid tutor and one volunteer. At coffee a discussion on male and female roles began. The students became so involved that, with the exception of one who went into an adjoining room with the volunteer to continue her planned work, they continued arguing until the caretaker came to lock up.

Because the students were so interested in the issue, the tutor planned some group work based on a story in a local paper about a male nurse who had won a medal for being the best nursing student. Over the next three sessions the students worked on a variety of tasks around the theme. Some of the individual and small group tasks the students worked on were:

- ☐ finding out about the legislation on equality and employment
- ☐ looking up factual information in libraries
- ☐ bringing in articles about men and women
- ☐ interviewing friends and relatives on their views about male and female roles.

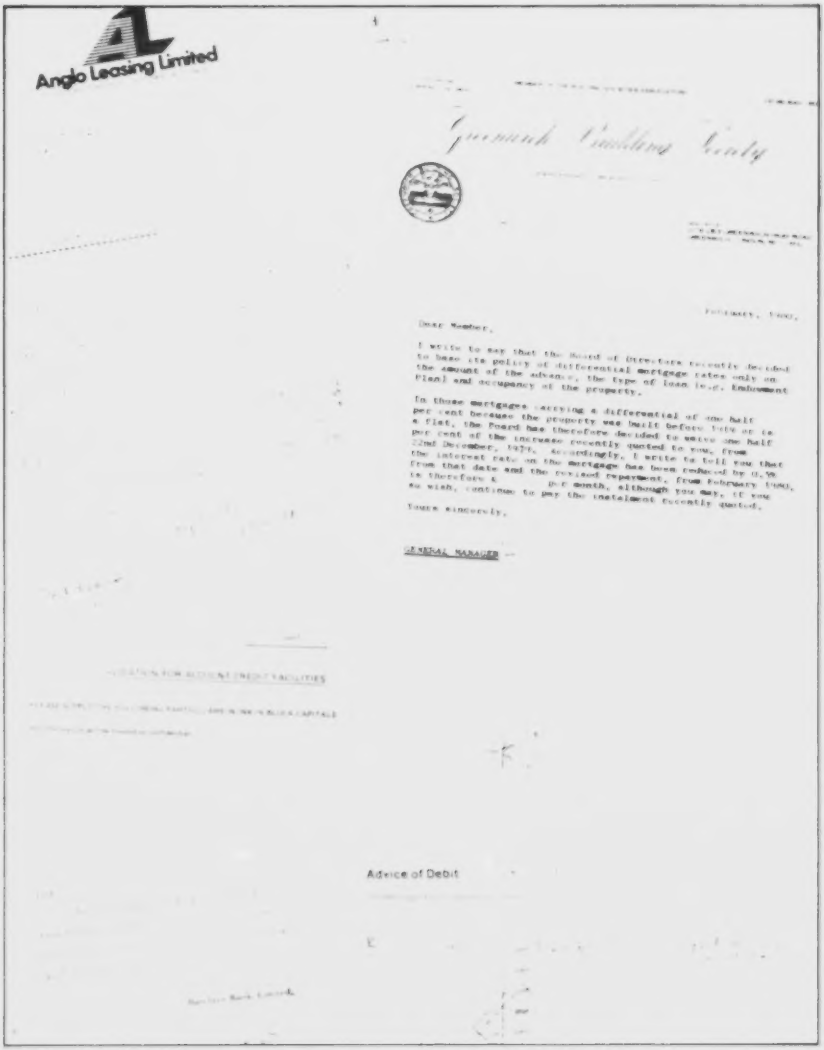
The tutor typed up the students' writing for others in the group to read and planned supplementary work on specific literacy problems encountered by individual students.

After three sessions it was obvious that it was time to leave this subject, but periodically during the next two terms someone in the group would bring in a cutting for the others to read. Gradually a bank of resources which included student writing, articles, factual information, worksheets, cartoons and cloze exercises was built up. This bank of materials was eventually loaned to another group who had started to talk about the same topic.

Functional Activities

Often the most effective way of working on a functional task or specific skill is to do so in a group. Not only does it make efficient use of the tutor's time, but also has the advantage of allowing each student to share his own understanding and skills with others.

Margaret came to the session one afternoon needing help with a letter to the council to rearrange the date for the redecoration of her flat. I helped Margaret with the letter, but realised she needed to spend some more time on working on formal letters if she was to be able to cope with it in the future. I also knew that some of the other students wanted to do some work on letter writing and decided to plan some work on this. One of the problems of working on functional tasks is to make them as realistic as possible, so I asked the students what kind of official letters they had had to write.


Anglo Leasing Limited
Dear Member,
I write to say that the Board of Directors recently decided
to base its policy of differential mortgage rates only on
the amount of the advance, the type of loan (e.g. Endowment
Plan) and occupancy of the property.
In those mortgages carrying a differential of one half
per cent because the property was built before 1914 or is
a flat, the Board has therefore decided to waive one half
per cent of the increase recently quoted to you, from
22nd December, 1975. Accordingly, I write to tell you that
the interest rate on the mortgage has been reduced by 0.5%
from that date and the revised repayment, from February 1980,
is therefore £ p.c month, although you may, if you
so wish, continue to pay the instalment recently quoted.
Yours sincerely,
GENERAL MANAGER
Advice of Debit

Developing a Specific Skill

As with functional tasks, a group session can often be a good way of teaching a specific skill, such as skimming and punctuation. Not only does it make for more efficient use of a tutor's time, it also means more thorough learning, as the following example shows.

A number of students were having difficulty with the use of apostrophes, and so I decided it was something I could usefully cover with everyone. I knew I would have to teach the different functions of the apostrophe at intervals of several weeks to minimise confusion, so I decided to begin with the possessive.

I talked it through with the group, using the blackboard and plenty of examples. I passed around a worksheet which had various sentences with the apostrophe missing; I read each one out one by one, and students took it in turns to say where they would put the apostrophe and why.

Next I asked the students to invent their own examples and write them down. They helped one another and checked their ideas out so I was free to help anyone who wanted help with spelling. One of the less advanced students modelled his examples on the worksheet.

At the last stage, each student read out his examples, and I wrote them on the board and the group commented on them. It was a surprisingly lively session, and the students ended up with a much clearer idea of the principles involved than if they had simply worked alone.

Apostrophes

1) Its a rainy day today.

2) Lets go to the pictures and see James Bonds new film.

3) The Council has done its best to clean the towns streets.

4) Theres a man outside asking for you.

5) The womens cloakroom is over there.

6) Its a shame he hasnt come to the class.

Reading and Comprehension

Many of the activities described so far involve reading of one kind or another. The following ideas are all concerned with developing reading and comprehension skills. They could be used as part of other group sessions when the tutor wants to develop such skills.

Group cloze exercise

It was on the morning . . . . . the tenth day that he . . . . . the footprints. He had gone . . . . . to the northern shore collecting . . . . . stones for the floor he . . . . . making and he was searching . . . . . the black rocks that had . . . . . from the steep cliff and . . . . . making a tumbled road into the . . . . . You could hop from stone . . . . . stone without getting your feet . . . . . he thought. Then he saw . . . . . footprints in the black volcanic . . . . . .

Cloze procedure can be both more enjoyable and contribute more to learning if it is done as a group exercise. In the example above each member of the group had a copy of the passage to be worked on, and the tutor read it out to the group taking great care not to fill in any of the gaps inadvertently. Students then worked individually or in pairs to complete the passage, and when that was done the whole group came together to pool their suggestions and hear what others had come up with before deciding which words they would accept. It is important to realise that the original word may not be the only correct answer. Any word that makes sense and is acceptable in the context of the passage is equally correct, and therefore there are many naturally occurring opportunities for discussion about agreement between noun and verb, singular and plural, meaning, stylistics, etc., with everyone in the group able to comment and contribute.

Bill suggested 'on' instead of 'of' for the first blank. Arthur commented that it would make sense but didn't sound right with the two 'ons' so close together; someone else said that they weren't sure it was right in fact, and suggested that Bill had accidentally missed the first 'on' when he read it through. Bill then remembered he had remembered it as 'in' and settled happily for 'of'.

Similarly, after discussion, the group accepted 'saw/noticed/found' for the second blank, but rejected 'spotted' because it sounded a bit too 'slangy' to fit in.

Group sequencing

Here a passage is cut up into sections and, working in pairs, the students are set the task of rearranging the sections until an acceptable sequence is achieved. Then the group comes together and compares their results. These in turn can be checked against the original uncut passage.

This exercise helps students become aware of 'signposts' in texts and helps to develop fluency and comprehension. The passage used can be chosen from a variety of contexts, a set of instructions, a piece of student's writing or a newspaper article.

An example is given below.

Watering plants

a. Thoroughness can only be achieved by using a hose or sprinkler.

b. All watering of plants must be gentle and must be through.

c. Be especially careful to use one for watering pot plants or you may wash a hole in the soil.

d. Watering plants sounds a simple enough job, but often it does more harm than good.

e. Give a steady and prolonged soaking instead of playing about simply wetting the surface.

f. To make it gentle, never use a can or hose without using a rose or sprinkler fitting.

(original sequence: **d, b, f, c, a, e**)

Group prediction

Here the group works together from the start. Each student has a copy of the first few sentences of a chosen text, which the tutor reads out to the group. Then she asks what the group can tell from the text, – Who is speaking? When was it written? What is it about? Where is it? What might happen next? The students can put forward any theories or suggestions they like, but they must be able to justify them from the text.

When the piece of text is exhausted, the following sentences are distributed and read, and theories are confirmed or changed or shown to be wrong. The tutor asks what students think now they have seen the next part. This proceeds, for two or three more turns, until a suitable point to stop is reached.

1. **The fog was all around them now. Since that last heavy snowfall during the night, the temperature had risen steadily and quickly. But the weather had tricked them; the damp icy fingers of the swirling mist now felt twice as cold.**

Students' comments: Can't tell much yet: boys on Dartmoor? people trapped in fog? lost their way? in winter? morning?

2. **Phillips hurried down the passage. Turner, binoculars round his neck, was just leaving for the tower. Phillips stretched out a hand and stopped him.**

Students' comments: Spy because of binoculars? but tower? in a castle? an observation point? birdwatchers? soldiers?

3. **"What is it Lieutenant" he demanded. "Who fired?" "I don't know for sure, sir, but I've a damn good idea who it is. Our friend from last night is back again", then he brushed aside Phillips' hand and hurried off.**

Students' comments: soldiers lost in fog or trapped in it? in a ruined castle or observation point? being fired on? so in Europe or fiction story? Phillips officer in charge?

4. **Phillips looked after him, anxious and puzzled. For a moment he was uncertain what to do. Then he turned abruptly and gave the order to submerge.**

Students' comments: Lieutenant can be Navy as well, oh yes, the binoculars, old fashioned; so it's probably a second world war/Navy story about a submarine in the Channel or in the North Sea . . .

Talking in a group

Talking and discussion in groups can be a valuable part of learning and and helps to create a good atmosphere. There are important links between talking, reading and writing.

Talking in a group

- ☐ starts from existing strengths and skills
- ☐ uses students' working knowledge of the rules of language
- ☐ draws on the passive vocabulary which students possess
- ☐ develops students' confidence.

Talking and reading

Talking:

- ☐ makes reading more purposeful
- ☐ helps develop understanding and the ability to interpret a text
- ☐ helps develop a critical approach to print
- ☐ can arouse interest in a subject.

Talking and writing

Talking:

- ☐ can create a reason for writing
- ☐ helps to clarify thinking
- ☐ helps to order thoughts
- ☐ provides an audience for the writing
- ☐ helps in making decisions about language, style and tone.

When a group is really operating well, one of the most noticeable features is the amount of time spent in talking. However, many tutors feel uneasy about this. They are aware of the value of talking in developing a group feeling, helping to form relationships within the group, enabling people to share experiences, but they feel that this is something to be encouraged in coffee breaks rather than taking up precious tuition time. They may also face strong resistance from students who feel it is wasting time and not real 'work'.

Talking, however, can be a most important stage in developing students' desire to read and understand fully what they are reading.

'In my group of six students nearly all had read the Spirals book The Actor. *In their reading, several had struggled over individual words and hadn't really got the hang of the story. It was only after we had talked about the book and there was a long debate about whether the writer had only imagined being taken over by his ancestor that several went back to the book in order to read it with greater interest. Until then I don't think I had managed to get over the idea that there was a connection between ideas you can talk about everyday and words written down cold in books."*

Many students have difficulty starting to talk and discuss for the same reason they find it hard to start writing – they feel they haven't anything worth saying and that no-one will really want to listen anyway.

'Sometimes people have a low image of themselves so they think – 'Well, I don't have anything to say, nothing important ever happens to me. People wouldn't really be interested in my life and what I'm saying'.'

Every tutor needs to make it very clear that all spoken contributions are welcome and valuable. Therefore a casual comment can be important:

'I'm glad you made that point'.
'That's an interesting point of view'.
'Would you like to say a bit more about that?'

Although comments such as these will only be convincing if backed up by real listening and interest on the part of the tutor.

What is the tutor's role in a discussion?

In many ways the tutor's role is a delicate one. She is hoping that students will gain in confidence and learn the ground-rules of talking and discussion so that they will be able to go it alone. To begin with though, it is important to avoid appearing to dominate and yet retain control if need be.

The side conversation

It quite often happens that 2 or 3 people set up a side conversation while another person in the group is having his say. If this goes on for very long, it can break down the group discussion completely, so it's best if the tutor intervenes fairly quickly.

> *'Sorry to butt in, Jim, but I think Mary and Jenny want to say something'.*

Jim can be given an opportunity to finish what he is saying by returning to him quickly.

Conflict

Sometimes individual conflicts will become apparent during group discussion and these may be quite tricky to handle. Other members of the group may sort things out, but if this does not happen and the argument becomes too personal, the tutor may need to suggest that the people concerned should carry on the discussion with her outside the group a little later on.

In any group and particularly during group discussion, there are bound to be differences of opinion which inevitably lead to disagreement and conflict. Handling the conflict can be a difficult task, particularly if the tutor has strong views on the topic under discussion.

Unless a group is well versed in the "rules of debate" then a discussion may become very personal. It may take the form of a direct attack on one individual.

> *In one session a student had a go at another for staying in bed and not attending regularly. He replied that she should mind her own business so I intervened and suggested that the two students should talk things over with me later. This provided a cooling off period. After further discussion it turned out that the student hadn't realised how she'd been reacting or that feelings had been running high.*

That tutor managed to avert a very bad scene in the group, but also managed to re-establish relationships which subsequently led to a better working relationship.

How to cope with conflict - Defusing Strategies

One of the most common ways of cooling down a heated argument is for the tutor to step in with phrases such as:-

- '. . . of course there are two sides to every argument'
- Well that's one point of view . . .'
- 'Would anyone disagree with that . . . ?'
- 'Do you think that's always the case . . . ?'

More formal strategies include:

- a cooling off period
  a) by breaking off discussion
  b) by examining why the argument has become too personal (and if necessary establishing rules for group discussion)
  c) by introducing factual information e.g. by quoting facts and figures e.g. on immigration.
- *using role reversal* in which you ask students to argue the opposite view to their own. This technique has the advantage of giving more insight into the opposing view.

A debate can often be planned as well as unplanned. By introducing a topic known to be controversial, e.g. politics, religion, abortion, drugs etc. the tutor can deliberately initiate a debate so students can air their views.

In such a discussion the tutor may expect differences of opinion and may even feel disappointed if there is not heated exchange of views. However, the so-called controversial issue needs to be chosen carefully.

> *'It was unbelievable. The whole group were in complete agreement with each other but in complete disagreement with me! I felt I couldn't just let them go on. I had to tell them how wrong they all were!'*
>
> *"In one class we discussed 'the monarchy'. After about 10 minutes it was clear that we all agreed with each other. I had thought we'd be arguing about it all night. I was surprised that there was so little disagreement".*

Selecting an appropriate topic isn't the only problem with this type of discussion. The tutor's role and how much she expresses and imposes her views are important issues.

Coping with silences

There will always be occasions in group work when there will be silences. Sometimes these happen naturally so that everyone can get on with a writing task in peace or when waiting for someone to arrive.

However, what many tutors fear is the unexpected silence which seems to hold up a discussion or which feels uncomfortable. If a silence falls during a discussion an anxious tutor may immediately assume that

- the students aren't interested
- the discussion has gone on too long
- the topic is too complex
- the topic is too controversial.

While any of these may sometimes be true it is always worth considering the positive side of silence.

Silence can be productive and it can be thinking time

- Silence can be the gap which a more reserved student needs to enter a discussion.
- Silence can simply be resting time. Twenty minutes of talk without a breathing space is exhausting for anyone.
- Silence can also show that the atmosphere is comfortable. Not all silences must be filled with talk.

However, if the tutor feels that the silence needs to be broken there are some ways of doing so.

- Ask if anyone else wants to say anything.
- Look at your notes to see if there are any points you still have not raised.
- Go back to the text or article you may have read at the beginning and read part of it out.
- Try and relate the subject matter to local experience, without becoming personal, ie. if you are talking about 'housing' relate this to a local housing development which students may know.

Questions

Sometimes a silence will fall after the tutor has asked a factual question, and this may happen when students don't know the answer. No student should be put on the spot in this situation. Rather, if the tutor knows the answer then she should give it if nobody else is able to. There is nothing more irritating than the 'pseudo question' in which students spend several minutes trying to get the answer.

Tutor: What does "Construction" mean?

SILENCE

Student: Is it something to do with building?

Tutor: Well . . . yes

SILENCE

Student: Is it to do with plans?

Tutor: No . . . not really . . . it's more to do with the whole thing.

Student: A building site?

Tutor: No . . .

SILENCE

This tutor is involving her students in an unnecessary guessing game 'Guess what I'm thinking', although there is not much chance that the students will get the word without her help.

Question and answer can be a very useful way of teaching something to a group which everyone needs to know. It should be used as a means of finding out *what the tutor needs to tell the students*, not *what students need to tell the tutor*. Every tutor also needs to remember to allow time for students to ask her questions.

Although there are many different kinds of question used by tutors there are a few that it is worth being aware of.

1. An open question . . . "How many ways can you think of obtaining advice about housing." (There is almost an indefinite number of answers.)
2. A closed question . . . "What is the meaning of technology?" (really only one or two correct answers.)

If a tutor presents too many closed questions to her group, this may act as a threat for those who can rarely get a 'right' answer. The advantage of an open question is that nearly all the answers are equally valuable or if they are off the track, this can still produce an interesting discussion.

Other kinds of questions are the:

- factual question (nearly always closed)

  'What . . .?'

- the reasoning question

  'Why . . .?' (can be open or closed, depending on how willing the tutor is to allow for unusual answers)

- the opinion question

  'What do you think of . . .?' (should be open, but often isn't).

Most tutors will use a combination of these types of question during sessions.

The following extract was used by a tutor in starting discussion on the Mini Metro in her class. Underneath are the sorts of questions she asked.

BL PROBE FAULTY METRO DEALER

Evening Post Reporter

BL HAD talks today with the dealer who supplied the Consumers' Association with a Metro car which allegedly had 35 defects on delivery.

A spokesman for the state-owned car firm said yesterday that all dealers were supposed to carry out a thorough pre-delivery check before handing cars over to customers.

The association's report on the Metro in its magazine Motoring Which? also said the car needed a new gearbox after 9,300 miles.

Other faults, it said, were a leaking tyre valve, low oil level, loose alternator mounting bolt, front panel bolt loose, squeak from clutch pedal and engine idling speed too fast.

BL says the damaged gearbox was caused by the association's tough performance testing.

Competition

The car has also been defended by the British School of Motoring, which has a fleet of 1,100 Metros, which said the Metro was the best new car ever introduced to its fleet.

The Consumers' Association has also said that on the whole its report was good. A spokesman said: "We reckon that this is a good car, and pretty competitive."

The original report concluded: "The Metro is a worthy contender in the small hatchback stakes, able to stand up to the competition in many ways and beat it in some, notably on running costs."

35 delivery faults, but Metro passes the Which? road test

By Gareth Parry

A report by the Consumers' Association magazine, Which? says an Austin Mini Metro it tested had 35 faults on delivery but concludes that the BL car was economical and versatile although a bit expensive.

The association said yesterday that overall, it was pleased with the Metro. A spokesman said: "We reckon this is a good car and pretty competitive."

Its report was based on a 10,000 mile test of a Metro purchased anonymously from an east London dealer. It had 35 defects on delivery, 14 of them paint blemishes. BL said the association's tough testing was to blame for a gearbox reported damaged.

Delivery defects included: oil level too low; alternator mounting bolt loose; accelerator cable out of adjustment; idling speed too fast; tyre valve leaking; exhaust pipe hitting sub-frame; clutch clearance wrong; heater flap rattling, rust on bonnet, slight water leak through heater.

There were also two small tears in back seat and stains on the driver's seat. Other faults, which developed during the test, included the door mirror loose, trim fell off (2,000 miles); exhaust rattle—mounting needed replacement (3,300 miles); front panel attachment bolt sheared off (3,300); clutch removed and spines cleaned as not always disengaging (6,000); water leak around windscreen (8,500).

The car needed a new gearbox after 9,300 miles and averaged only 30 miles per gallon.

Points to raise

What are the meanings of allegedly, hatchback, versatile

Do you know who the Consumer Association is?

How did B.L. explain the fact that the car needed a new gearbox so soon?

Why is B.L. talking to the dealer who sold a Metro to the Consumers' Association?

Would you buy a Metro? If not, what would you buy and why?

Talking and writing in groups

Many students lack confidence about writing. Their primary worry may be spelling, punctuation and grammar, but often interwoven with this is the belief that they should be able to write anything straight away, and if only they knew how to spell, the words would just flow. However, most people, however technically skilled they are, find that this just isn't so. It's only when the writer has made some decisions about

- the content of the writing
- has had time to reflect
- has gathered ideas and
- has worked out the structure of what he or she wants to say

that it is possible to make a start. Even then the first attempt may only represent a draft of what the writer wants to achieve.

A writer has to have a certain amount of confidence to believe that what he has to say is worth communicating. As Brian says in 'Let Loose':

> *"The situation you've got to start from is that you've got something to say, and you've got something to write".*

For many students, talking over their ideas in a group where their contributions are accepted and listened to can be a valuable experience in developing the confidence to put their ideas in writing. On the practical side, tutors often try to encourage a student to write without worrying about the spelling, because if he stops writing to ponder over a spelling, all too often the flow of ideas stops. A tutor can help with this by providing a list of words the student wants to use, and of course if this is compiled after discussion, it is more likely to contain the words the student really does want to use.

Group Writing

Facing up to writing: a group writing day

Group writing workshops can be very successful in encouraging free and fluent writing. The characteristics of a group writing workshop are

- there is ample time to think about what to say

- there is an opportunity to talk to others about your writing and theirs
- everyone is involved in all the processes, writing, editing and printing
- there is a final "product" which provides a focus for activities, and something to aim for.

Group size 10-20 people

Time A whole day where possible

Purpose To explore and encourage writing by producing a collection of written pieces (magazine) by the end of the day.

Materials Pens, paper, etc; tape recorders; typewriter; access to reprographic machines; overhead projector.

Procedure

Group members sit in a large circle. The group leader introduces herself briefly and says what she does and where she is from. Similar brief introductions are made round the room. Then everyone is invited in turn to say something about how they feel at that moment; a volunteer writes it quickly on an OHP roll:

..... Puzzled ..... Sort of waiting ..... Bit scared ..... Not sure why I came ..... Silly ..... Want to get started ..... Frightened.

The large group splits into groups of 5/6/7 to write, anything at all, for ten minutes. Some write happily; some very laboriously; some not at all, thinking desperately (often the tutors).

> *. . . Here we all are sitting writing; I've never listened to the sound of writing before . . . I look at everyone else writing and I can't do it, so I just sit here; it's too quiet for me . . . I can write facts down, but I can't write anything that's in myself . . .*

Those who want to, read out what they have written and there is discussion about it and about writing in general. People decide what they want to write for the collection and they go off to do it, by themselves, in twos or threes, with a tape recorder, a tutor, a typewriter, in any way they choose.

2nd Session

After lunch, written work begins to come in, and 5 or 6 people form an editing group – reading it through, talking about layout and sequence and passing it on to others for illustrating if wanted. It is then typed or handwritten for banda or for photocopier, as appropriate, and run-off. Two people man the reprographics and towards the end of the day a group

meets to put together enough copies so that everyone can have one. (If photocopying facilities are not available the finished sheets can be pinned to display boards for instant exhibition). There's time over tea to flick through it, then the large group reassembles and people are again invited to say how they feel this time:

> . . . Exhausted . . . Much more relaxed . . . Nice to meet people with time to listen . . . I've found out that writing is awful when you think about it, but fun to do, especially like this . . .

The major advantages of this type of workshop are that everyone is involved in writing. Everyone sees themselves in print. There is the opportunity for shared talk about the difference between people's writing, tutors included.

Group Writing

Problem Page

This has been found to be particularly suitable for young adults, but it can be used with older students who may have children of this age and will be keen to give advice. The intention of the exercise is to give practice in writing and to demonstrate to group members the relationship between discussion of ideas and writing.

Her Mum Really Hates Me!

My girlfriend's mum doesn't like me and I'm sure she's trying to break us up. The other day I went round to call for Sue as we'd arranged to go ice-skating. Her mum answered the door and said she'd already gone out and hadn't left any message.

Luckily I bumped into Sue in the high street and she told me she's only popped out to the shops for five minutes, and had asked her mum to tell me to wait!

Sue won't say anything 'cos she's afraid her mum will stop her seeing me altogether. But I'm getting so mad! What can I do?

Andy T., Brighton.

He's So Young!

Mine's not really a problem but it's a great worry to me. You see, all my friends (we're aged 13) go out with 15 and 16 year old boys. They want me to go out with one of their fella's mates, but I prefer this boy Mike, who's my age and has already asked me for a date.

I'm not sure whether to say yes or not 'cos I'm afraid my friends will laugh at me for going out with someone so young. Please help! *Gail S., Gwent.*

Our Mate's a Thief

We are very worried about our friend. Recently she's been stealing from the corner shop where she has a Saturday job. She is very friendly with the owner who trusts her completely. We've tried reasoning with her but she just tells us to push off. Please help.

Jean and Pat, Stockton.

Method

1. Introduce the exercise, making clear that the writing expected will not be judged on accuracy but rather more on content.
2. Choose a number of suitable problems from a problem page of a magazine, and make copies for each member of the group. Keep the answers provided by the magazine for comparison later.
3. Read through problems with class.
4. Either in small groups or in pairs, ask students to discuss the problem and agree on an answer. Ensure that someone in each group is capable of and confident enough to write the answers. This person then writes the comments of group members.
5. Answers are then circulated to the other small groups and discussed.
6. Large group session.
   Discuss answers provided by groups and compare them with answers provided by magazine.

   This exercise can be useful as:

   - those whose writing is poor can still contribute to what is produced
   - it provides practice in writing for a particular audience and in a particular style
   - it draws on the experience of students in dealing with social and personal problems
   - since it deals with a third person, the writer of the problem, it allows for discussion of relationships without invading students' privacy.

General points

Some of the advantages of writing in a group are:

- it can provide opportunities for group work on general points of grammar, spelling, capital letters, punctuation and vocabulary, without particular individuals feeling their weaknesses are being highlighted
- it is a logical follow-on from talking, reading and discussion
- it enables students to formulate and clarify their point of view; a process which aids the development of self-confidence and independence
- it extends vocabulary and therefore comprehension
- it provides an audience for what has been written.

However, writing is essentially a 'private' activity and there is a tendency, shared by all of us, to feel that any piece of written work is a reflection of the individual who produced it. Inevitably, students tend to be self-conscious about the need for drafting or re-writing, and are sometimes uncertain about the validity of their views.

Possible ways of using writing in a group

- *As a preliminary to discussion*, e.g. jot down three good reasons for being in the group.
  (This would be a 'private' piece of writing and as such, correction by the tutor of spelling, grammar etc. would be inappropriate, because it is a starting point for discussion, rather than a written exercise.)
- *As a means of clarifying and defining discussion*, e.g. 'We've talked about this, you write down what *you* think happened'.
- *In a functional way*, e.g. write a letter of complaint about some item, explaining that you want your money back.
- *As a means of learning vocabulary*, the tutor can provide the vocabulary by writing lists of words pertinent to the group and subject matter; students suggest words.

Tutor's Role

As far as possible the tutor should be as equally involved as students with writing tasks and this shows that a skilled writer also needs to rephrase, edit and cross out.

Presentation of a writing task

It is important to make certain things clear to students who are being asked to write. Some of these are:

- the audience for the writing
- the tone of the writing
- the purpose of the writing
- the need for accuracy or not as the case may be
- how public the finished product will be if it will be used outside the group.

Dealing with individual differences in a group

The example which follows shows how a tutor could deal with a group which contains students of varying ages, background and ability.

The students in this group have been attending their local literacy class regularly for two 2 hour sessions per week; and the work over a period of 4/5 weeks is described below.

The Group

The group was composed of the following students:

Alan 28 English. A complete beginner, needing help with all aspects of reading and writing. Sociable and friendly.

Colin 31 Irish. Beginner in reading and writing. Impatient with anything which diverted him from his own work on skills he saw as important.

Shelia 20 Scottish. She had recently had her first baby. Her attendance was irregular probably missing one in three sessions. Fairly competent in reading and writing.

Bill 36 White Rhodesian. Able to read and write quite well, but problems in spelling and punctuation. Strongly prejudiced against the two black students in the group.

Grant 19 Jamaican. Poor educational background. Truant from school. Reasonably literate and numerate but not keen to work in any way he saw as like school.

Maria 26 Spanish speaker. Good spoken English after eleven years in England. Poor written English.

Gerard 47 St. Lucian. Slow at reading and writing. Spoke English with a strong accent.

*Eileen (tutor); Stephanie (assistant tutor)

The range of age, ability and attitude in this group presented the tutor with certain problems in devising work suitable for the group.

Eileen

For some of the time it was possible for students to work at their own pace. But I began to feel that this created a feeling that myself and Stephanie were the "source of all wisdom". I felt that working in a group would help to overcome this, and would encourage students to respect one another's views and abilities. However in developing group work I had to resolve some fundamental differences in the group. Colin and Grant had very different ideas about what the best way to learn was. Colin preferred a formal situation, Grant reacted against that. At every stage I had to explain to the group what my reasons were for doing things, and show how it related to their learning.

At first Bill was inclined to make rude remarks to and about Grant and Gerard. I had to make a point of telling him that he might not be willing to change his attitude, but he should not make such comments. Although he could have helped other students in the group as he was more fluent on paper, I had to be careful not to force this as he was not popular with the group and several would not accept his help.

The other problem which arose was dealing with Sheila's spasmodic attendances. I often had to spend a few minutes at the start of the session telling her where we had got to. Sometimes Stephanie could help her but often enough she was needed by Alan and Colin. All in all I had to keep in mind constantly, who was where, who could help who and what we were trying to get over.

The Play

After a few weeks the idea of writing a play begun to crystallise in the group. This would start with improvisation and using students own words on tape would gradually develop over a number of weeks.

I had the regular use of a fairly large room on the ground floor of the Institute although, as part of the space was partitioned off for use as an office, which was busy from time to time, it was a question of making the most of its advantages.

These were clearly:

a) use of overhead projector

b) use of separate booths for tape work

c) ample space to shift tables and chairs

d) plenty of easy chairs and coffee table.

The room

We all decided that we would be more comfortable in the 'easy chairs'. At this point it became important to check that all students could see the OHP and that any writing on it was large enough and clear enough for

everyone to read. It was a situation in which I now had to maximise the use of Stephanie. I knew it would be impossible for me to tape what was being said and write on the OHP. As she had good handwriting, I suggested that she managed the projector. In this way I was free to deal with the tape as well as participating in and steering the group.

Activities

Week One

1. General discussion about plays that group members have seen and discussion of possible play writing by students.
2. Group decides on situation: (e.g. 'Grant wins the pools and comes into class to take the group out').
3. Each member of the group 'talks their way into the situation'. Tutor tapes the language used, and steers direction by participating and offering suggestions on words used and timing.

   It is usually possible for every student to make a contribution.

Assistant Tutor's Task

1. Writes down what is said as it is said, on the overhead projector. Students can then read it back immediately.

2. Tutor plays back tape, and group listen to themselves, making comments and self criticism.
3. Students write down their lines from the overhead projector.
4. Tutor types out students' speech in play form for following week.

Week Two

1. Group listens to tape and students follow silently with script.
2. Students practise reading their parts aloud.
3. Tutor tapes students' speech and replays to group for comments.
4. Alterations are made as necessary. Any latecomers can be encouraged to participate and add to tape spontaneously.

Activities for Following Two Week Development

These two weeks are a combination of whole group work and sub-group work.

Eileen

Alan and Colin – tracking with tapes cutting up own speech, re-arranging and re-reading with Stephanie.

Maria and Gerard – punctuating play, work on spelling groups within play language that they may have problems with – with me.

Sheila, Bill and Grant – re-writing, editing of play, proof reading.

The group then came together to discuss editing techniques and to give opinions.

The play was re-read and redrafted according to students and my wishes, selecting and focussing on particular weak areas (judged by group members) and/or suggested by me and Stephanie.

We then added the music and an introduction and arranged to play it to other students.

The play was discussed during coffee breaks for several weeks to follow and this seemed a natural process of the group evaluating their own work.

I felt that this was because everybody had appeared to get something out of it, and that it was an enjoyable experience. It also seemed to give the beginner students encouragement and much more confidence in their own abilities as well as establishing them within the 'group'.

This activity had several advantages and had the following implications:

- Students' own interests can be used for relevant teaching material.
- Talking is something all students can participate in. Time spent on talking is not wasted time.

- Although more time may be spent in the initial stages on preparation – especially in activities of this nature it is an investment. Materials can be used in other sessions. The typed play script and tapes can be used several times in different ways therefore cutting down on future preparation.

An extract from the play is shown below. It is in ordinary language which students felt comfortable with. The process used i.e. acting out a part and then transcribing the words used, could be used by tutors during more humdrum exercises such as practising or simulating interviews, making a complaint, asking for benefits etc. In these circumstances, students would 'talk out' the situation in order to work out the sort of vocabulary and appropriate speech patterns used in these cases.

Scene I

Gerard	As you know, Grant got plenty of money.
Colin	Are you going to invite the whole of us out?
Eileen	HOW did you get this money?
Grant	Listen, baby, I won the pools.
Maria	HOW did you get all this money?
Sheila	Let's go dancing, baby.
Bill	Are you going to buy us all drinks?
Maria	Champagne all round.
Grant	Pink Champagne!!
Gerard	I'd like you to give me some of the money, Grant, so I could have a nice holiday in Africa to go and search for my roots.
Grant	You don't get my money, you got no roots man. Ha Ha.

Group work over several weeks

A preparatory TOPS course

Setting A full-time course in a college of further education.

All the students had an interview before starting their course and this was the 'common experience' that was used as a basis for group discussion, and other class work. The tutor was often present at these interviews and thus shared the experience, although, as an interviewer, her vantage point was somewhat different from those of the students.

The group Sixteen students, of various ages and backgrounds. About half of the group are of Asian origin and thus some language tuition is needed.

Subject Communications.
Formed part of an 18 week block of work on *Vocational Preparation and Guidance.*

Time 3 hours per week. 9.00 a.m. - 12 noon.

Purpose To practise language skills and develop awareness of the expectations of interviewers.

Week 1

General group discussion

'Interviews I have been to', using students' interview for the Pre-TOPS course as one example, students are asked for examples of:

i) questions they were asked

ii) answers they gave

iii) questions they asked the interviewer

Problems at interviews

Students may give examples of things that have gone wrong at interviews – not understanding the questions, not making yourself understood, not being able to think of any questions to ask – and discuss how to cope with such problems. Points raised are put on blackboard/overhead projector.

Week 2

Questions you may ask the interviewer

The tutor compiles a list of questions raised by students in the previous session.

Worksheet

Questions at Interview

Look at the following questions. Which ones would you ask? Which ones wouldn't you ask? Why?

1. How much are you going to pay me?
2. Is there any over-time?
3. How many hours do I have to work?
4. Does it matter if I'm late?
5. Do I have long holidays?
6. What do I have to do if I want time off?
7. Do you give sick-pay?
8. Is there a staff canteen?
9. Have you had many strikes recently?
10. What union do the staff belong to?
11. Is it a closed shop?
12. If I don't like the job, can I change it?
13. Is there a training scheme?
14. Is it a dead-end job?
15. Are there any promotion prospects?
16. Do you make redundancy payments?
17. How often do you give pay rises?

Rewrite the questions where necessary, or think about how you would rephrase them.

The tutor could then use the responses of students as a basis for discussion. It may be important to consider the way a question is asked as well as *what* is asked.

Group is sub-divided into smaller groups of approximately 4 students

Each group is a 'company' which wants to recruit more staff. The group decides on the nature of the company – this may involve searching out information about local companies. Familiarisation with jargon or technical terms may also be necessary.

Each sub-group decides what type of staff it wants to recruit, and prepares

1. Job advertisements.
2. Job descriptions.
3. Application forms.
4. 'Scripts' for the subsequent interviews i.e. questions they will ask the interviewee. May include some telephone work i.e. potential applicants ringing up for application forms, further details of job etc.

Tutor acts as provider of information and assistant to each small group. She also checks that deadlines are being met.

Week 3

Interviewing

- Each company is the interviewing panel – some of the other group members are the interviewees.
- Usually one-to-one interviews are practised before the panel interviews are watched by the rest of the group.

Discussion

(If video equipment is available, this exercise can be filmed and discussed afterwards.) Discussion of each set of interviews. Problems that have arisen.

How could the interview performance have been improved? Would the person have got the job? If not, why not?

General Points

- ☐ Any group discussion needs focus and guidance and the tutor needs to record and coordinate points raised.
- ☐ The smaller group exercise allows students to see the interview from the employer's point of view, and also allows for contributions by those who would not speak in a larger group.
- ☐ The exercise is designed to draw out the previous experiences of the group. Most adults have several experiences of being interviewed.
- ☐ Asking students to do the interviews boosts confidence and gets rid of some of the mystique of interviewing.

Managing the group

Roles and Relationships

In a group, different members tend to adopt different parts or roles. The role they play may be their own choice or they may have it thrust upon them. Sometimes the witty student who always tells jokes gets really tired of being the class jester, but doesn't know how to change things, since everyone seems to expect him to behave in a certain way.

Group leader

This may or may not be the tutor, but usually is, at least for the first few meetings of the group.

The role you play in a group is not always entirely your own choice, as although group attitudes and expectations can be modified, many students and other members of staff expect the tutor to be the leader.

A tutor who wants to play a different role from the one her grup expects may find opposition from the group.

However, how the tutor expresses her leadership is negotiated in the group with the students.

The group tutor almost always has the following responsibilities:

- resource for learning and materials
- organiser of room: furniture, layout, light
- tone-setter for the group, especially methods of study
- promotor of discussion and activity, but without too much domination and control
- introduction of suitable topic.

What sort of a leader are you?

It can often be useful to pose certain questions which help us reflect on some of the ways in which group leaders, intentionally or unintentionally influence the functioning of groups.

Points to think about

- Are you consistent in your behaviour towards all group members? Do you treat them all equally? Impartially?
- Which is more important to you, a session where no problems or conflicts surface, or a session where a lot of learning is accomplished? Have you got the balance right?
- Do you always 'mark' students' contributions: 'Yes', 'No', 'A good point?' Is there any risk that pleasing you means more than actually contributing towards the task in hand? What effect can that have?
- When students are working individually, are you usually the only one talking? Do other people break the silence easily? Do students help each other?
- Do you ever ask questions when you already know the answers? Do you think your students know that you are doing this? If they do, how does it affect them?

Dealing with new students

Many courses in basic education are 'roll-on roll-off' courses, and have new students entering the course at any point to take the place of those who have left.

Depending on the way the group works, there are various ways of introducing the new student, and each tutor should choose the most appropriate way, depending on the circumstances.

1. If the group is working quietly, doing individual work, the tutor could spend time talking to the new student, describing the course and trying to get an idea of the student's abilities and needs.
2. If the group is taking part in a discussion, the new student could be introduced and left to decide whether to join in or not.
3. If the group is working in sub-groups, the tutor could either spend time talking to the student on his own, or introduce him to a sub-group to watch or take part if and when he wants to.

If there is not time during the first lesson to talk to the new student on his own, the tutor could take time at the end of the session to do so. On the whole, most new students would prefer to keep a low profile at this first stage, so it is best not to force him to join anything immediately.

Changing relationships

One of the main differences between teaching a group and teaching an individual is that a group seems to have 'a life of its own'.

All groups seem to go through a number of stages before they eventually start working as a group, and most tutors feel that it takes about six meetings before the group begins to function well.

To begin with the members of the group tend to rely heavily on the tutor, and do not help or support one another a great deal.

As time goes on, the need for students to rely on the tutor gets less and less, and the group members begin to have the confidence to decide on certain things. The group may even decide what is and what is not acceptable within the group. Do they bring in flasks of coffee for the coffee break, or do they call each other by their first names? These group 'norms' develop particularly quickly in a full-time group and can be a great advantage to the tutor. If cooperation and support is available for members of the group from other members, this can relieve the tutor of some of the responsibility for students' welfare.

Evaluation

A tutor cannot be too observant. A gesture, a yawn, or a casual comment from a student may mean much more than spoken or written remarks. To begin with at least, most students will shy away from being completely frank when they fill in evaluation sheets or talk about activities, simply because they will not want to risk upsetting the tutor. However, the tutor can do a lot to encourage them to be candid by making it clear that she doesn't expect everything to go brilliantly all the time and that she will not be deeply offended by constructive criticism, but would rather welcome it.

Checking on progress

Ultimately the aim of group tuition is to encourage students to be as independent in their learning as possible, to organise and plan their own work and to seek out knowledge and information for themselves.

One literacy scheme gives a questionnaire at the end of each term which each individual fills in (sometimes with help) to act later as a basis for group discussion.

1. Since you joined what have you enjoyed most?
2. What have you enjoyed least?
3. How do you feel about the group?
4. What would you like us to do in September?

Most students find it easier to write down their responses on paper before coming out with them in public

> *'I just can't remember what I never enjoyed'*
> *'I didn't like the first week'*
> *'The longer we meet the more relaxed we get as a group'*
> *'I think we should do more on spelling'*

The Diary

The idea of the diary can be most suitable for a group which meets regularly as part of a course. The students take it in turns to record one day's activities and to comment on what they feel the reactions of the group are. The length of the entries varies enormously. Photographs taken on outings can also be put into the diary, as can course programmes as they are devised.

> *Tuesday*
>
> 'It's just my luck to get a day when we didn't do anything very exciting, like going on a visit, but I still quite liked some of the things we did. My small group had to write a letter to the Health Officer asking if he would come and talk to us sometime. Of course, some of us were better at that than the others and someone who we all know makes everything into a joke, but we know how to sort him out now . . .'

Points for the tutor

Group Evaluation

- ☐ This will tend to develop later on in the life of the group.
- ☐ Evaluation is not always critical – students can *encourage* each other as well.
- ☐ Don't make public a comment which has been made to you in private.
- ☐ Act on the information you get. If your student has the nerve to make a criticism of your teaching or methods, he must feel it strongly.

Problems Encountered by Group Tutors

Question

One of my students – it's an adult literacy group – refuses to join in any form of group work whatsoever. He persuades one of the voluntary tutors to work with him in a corner of the room and turns his back on everyone else. What should I do?

Response

It would be worth taking him on one side and asking him just why he dislikes the idea of group work so much. Maybe he fears exposing what he doesn't know or perhaps he feels he only learns well in a 1:1 situation. He may need lots of reassurance about this. You could suggest a compromise where he agrees to take part in a few group activities and then discuss it with you again. In the end, though, you can only persuade.

Question
I've inherited a group which isn't really a group at all – it's a collection of student and tutor pairs working together in the same room. The pairs hardly speak to each other and the room is very, very quiet. How should I start to change things?

Response
You could try explaining, quite frankly, why you feel it would be a good idea to work together more, as a group. Ask people to 'give it a try', at least, for a limited period of time. Try to establish a few topics of common interest and ask each pair to do some preparation for a general group discussion. Once the barriers do begin to break down you will most likely find the work goes surprisingly well.

Question
There's a voluntary tutor in my group who tries to dominate everything and everyone in it. When a new student joins the group this tutor leaps in and 'takes over' as soon as my back is turned. It's becoming a real power struggle. What should I do?

Response
First of all, this tutor is obviously not a very suitable person for the job and you need to talk to whoever put him in your group in the first place – presumably the scheme organiser? You may both decide that he would be better employed elsewhere in the scheme. If he is retained in the group, I think you need to be very directive about what you want him to do. It may be a good idea to prepare a detailed checklist of objectives and methods for him to follow with the students he is helping. If would also be helpful if you can find out just why he needs to indulge in this 'power struggle'.

Question
My students nearly all have home or personal problems and much of my time is spent trying to help them deal with them. I'm beginning to feel that I'm neglecting my teaching and preparation trying to sort out housing, money worries, problems with the law . . . What should I do?

Response
Try and encourage your students to look to other sources of help since you are only going to get bogged down if you try to do the job of all the advice services in your area. By all means use the materials which such problems give rise to (in a general way, not a personal one), and keep an up-to-date list of local welfare agencies. Wherever possible, get the student to make the approach himself as at the end of the course your students will need to act independently of you.

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